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COURANT



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THE CHICKEN LADY

There is a lady that sells chickens, live ones, at the marketplace. She is a big woman, as sturdy and tough as a turkey drumstick, strong and sure with the women and backslapping with the men. Her laugh can be heard above all else; the bicycle bells and whining livestock, sputtering motorbikes and babbling barterers. She stands by her stall firmly planted in high black boots, a black dress billowing around her ankles, a black sweater tight across her plush bosom, a bosom that might have been stuffed with the feathers of her own chickens. A black top hat is secured on her head by a black kerchief, and thus attired she attends to her business of selling live chickens.

She transports her chickens, fat brown bantam hens and scrawny roosters, on a motorbike, a seemingly puny contraption under her weight that nonetheless carries her flying over the hills, basket of chickens tied to back fender. She knows the village people, the fishermen and market woman, the little children who are never at school and the older ones apprenticing at the bakery or the hairdressers. She knows just which chicken is right for her regular customers, and never minds the outsiders in bermuda shorts and sunglasses that stare, snapping pictures and marveling at her brawny brown arms as they pull forth chicken after chicken, until all she clutches are handfulls of chicken feathers, and then it is time to leave.

Camp Bendito, Harrison Maine. An hour's drive from Brunswick. Camp Bendito run by Dot and Thelma or Dot and Thumper. Thumper got her nickname from the sound she made when pumping her portable organ at chapel. Thelma small and scrawny. Dot. Huge, rotund, fleshy Dot. Dot with her men's clothes and hairdo.

Bendito was six cabins and a lodge on a hill by the side of a lake. A lake that was full of leeches, turtles and slimy plants.

The aluminum dock that burned when the sun was hot. It was 'L' shaped and separated the deep water from the shallow.

And the people: Maeve, Puffer, Hedless, T-Fank. Liz the Little Latrine Maker, Rowena, Abernathy, Ferris-Wheel, Metzzy, Tobin, Jand and Sarah, Shooky, Barb McCarthy, Kerplunk, Lindsey and Laura. Stephanie Butterfield and her bugle. Hugh in his sleeveless undershirt making ice cream. Grinding the handle round and round, the rock salt gently reflecting the sun. Reaching around behind himself to grab a bag of snap turtle he found in the road when the lake overflowed.

Hedless' real name was Hedy Galbraith but we called her Hedless which naturally deteriorated to Footless. She was the only one caught on our one and only sneak. Our cabin snuck down to the one at the bottom-Senoritas. I hid under Gini Royall's bed, Sarah under Metzzy's, Puffer under Tobin's and the rest I've forgotten. Hedless never showed. Was she captured? Had a bear gotten her? Had some boys from the camp across the lake carried her away? We cut our sneak short to look for her back at our cabin. Once inside the silent alarm went off that Dot was making a surprise cabin check. Here she came with the huge flashlight shining it at the windows of the cabins. She shone it at our clothesline and there was Hedless flattened on the ground, caught like a German spy.

Rowena. Round Rowena. Amazingly large round Rowena. Eleven years old and built like a tank. Always a bag of candy in her trunk. And T-Fank. Little T-Fank the T.C. in Rowena's cabin giving her a piggy-back ride around the flag-pole. At the picnic at Twin Bridges Rowena ate ten bright red hotdogs. At Twin Bridges Ferris-Wheel fell in the water. Ferris-Wheel was Ann Ferris but why should we call her Ann? Scary Ann with no sense of humor. Crying wildly when she got a letter from her foster mother telling her they were sending her to MacLeans School.

Ferris-wheel with no manners at all, knowing well that Thelma's eyes didn't match, asking her what color they were at the dinner table. Thelma smiled and writhed just a little.

Some mornings we'd have fried dough for breakfast with maple syrup. Pale brown balls of fried dough looking like a Sputnik. The first bite . . . ah! The second was good . . . the rest was not so good. It sat like a lump in your stomach for the rest of the day.

Rainy days at Bendito sitting by the fire in the grey stone fire place at the lodge. Christa trying to teach us fundamentals of sailing and how to tie knots. Christa scared us. Always coming back late at night in tears after another fight with her boyfriend. Christa coming back from the shower after getting ready for a dance. The space between her eyebrows black and blue, her legs spotted with bloodied toilet paper.

Nancy Bowen was going to go to Connecticut College in September.

"Hey Nance, my godfather's the president of Connecticut."

"What?!?"

"Yeah, he is."

"Ohh . . . God! Are you kidding? Tell him how great I am . . . Please!"

"Don't worry Nancy you're already in!"

"Ohhh . . ." Running out the front door to talk to the other counselors.

7:15 A.M. Camp Bendito forms a circle around the flagpole beneath the lodge. With the flag folded in a triangle in my arms, I step forward out of the circle and walk to the pole. Rowena follows. I'm shaking. Rowena takes the flag while I untie the rope from the cleat and pull until the two hooks are in reach. Rowena holds out the flag. Putting out my hand I touch the stripes. Rowena drops her arms to her sides and down falls the flag to the dust. Gasps from all round. I pick it up with shaking hands, hook the clips through the holes and hoist it. My ears are red and Rowena is sniggering. I start to giggle. The flag reaches the top, so I tie the rope around the cleat. Standing between Puffer and Maeve as Stephanie plays. We're all laughing without making noise. Stephanie is finished and we all rush up to the lodge to breakfast. Dot glowers at me. I give her an innocent look and run to my table.

Green medicine. The infamous green medicine, infamous and dreaded. Connie would give it to you if you were throwing up or if your leg was broken. I woke up feeling a little uncertain and Nance said I should see the nurse. Walking slowly up the hill from my cabin, past the tetherball, the lodge, the patch of prickles, to the tiny white building, the infirmary. Connie, gray and stooped, tottered out to meet me. Listening to my complaint she stared me through the door and sat me in a hard white chair. It's very quiet. The clock ticks loudly. Far away the Bendito Bucket chugs up the hill. Connie comes back with a huge bottle of Green Medicine. I twist my legs around and hold the seat with my hands.

"Open wide . . . there." I try not to breathe but I do and the taste fills my mouth. I like it! I LIKE GREEN MEDICINE! Wow, maybe I'll get sick everyday.

I get up and walk carefully out the door.

"Bye! Thanks a lot!"

Rushing down the hill, through the prickles toward the tether-ball. Socking it with my fist it whips around and around, going as far as it can, then unwinding itself. I run to my cabin, banging the screen door behind me as loudly as I can.

Taps was over an hour ago. It's thundering, the rain is falling loudly, smashing down on the leaves of the huge birch that grows against our cabin. Lightning flashes. Water pounds on the roof and splashes in through the windows. All of us scrambling from warm cots into damp air to unroll the canvas shades. A sharp crack of thunder and shrieks. Barb comes rushing in dripping water.

"Barb!"

"Oh help, where's Nance? Nance!"

"Hey Barb!"

"Shut up. Where's Nance?"

"The lodge."

"What's happening?"

"What the hell —"

"What's going on?"

"Shut up I wanna sleep!"

"Barb, what's the matter? What happened?"

"Yeah Barb—"

"Hey Barb—"

"Where's Nance?"

"I SAID THE LODGE!"

"O.k."

"What the hell's going on?"

"A tree fell on one of the cabins—"

"What!?"

"Oh, God!"

"Holy shit!"

"Which one?"

"Senoritas"

"How many dead?"

"Shut up Puffer, you would ask that."

"But I—"

"Don't know. I'm going to check but I have to find Nance."

"SHE'S IN THE LODGE!"

"I KNOW!"

"Bye Barb."

"Good luck!"

"Shut up and lemme sleep!"

"Say hi to Nance for me."

"O.k. Bye!"

The door slams shut behind her.

Is Metzzy dead? And Tobin? And Liz the Little Latrine Maker? Maeve?

Jane? Sitting up in bed in the dark, hearing the rush of the rain falling, hearing the thunder crack and rumble, feeling a cool breeze from through the screen door. Waiting. Screams and laughter from the foot of the hill.

Nance opens the door and shakes herself like a wet sheep dog. Spraying everyone.

"How is—?"

"Yeah how—?"

"Everything's fine. Nobody's hurt now shut up and go to bed!"

"But Nance—!"

"HEDY!"

"O.k."

In the morning we all run to Senoritas in our pajamas. Nothing disturbed.

"Where's the tree that fell?"

"Oh that. Just a branch."

'Chicken Fat' breaks the morning stillness. It's exercise time. Skipping up the hill, we all join in.

The last night. Eleven o'clock. Stephanie Butterfield standing at the top of the hill by the flagpole, blowing 'charge!' on her bugle. From six cabins stream ghostly bodies in pajamas. Running and shrieking to the lake's edge and into the water. Rowena doesn't know how to swim so she stands on the wharf and yells. All floundering and splashing out to the float to try racing dives in the moonlight.

Dot appears on the dock, huge and angry. Hands on hips. Sixty girls flying out of the water in sopping pajamas. Running up the hill, up the steps into the cabins. Slamming doors. Yelling and laughter, Dot walks slowly up from the lake. Hands in pockets. Quiet. The large, angry body disappears into the lodge. Quiet. Giggles break the night. Quiet.

I cannot say exactly why I write. I like it. It is a mild form of self-expression. Rather than sit down and retell my entire life, I isolate events on paper. Events, however small, that have some meaning to me. A moment that I will remember all my life and that I'd like others to know about. Summer camp and all the ridiculous things that happened; my teddy bear; a year spent in another country: anything really. If people like it, if one line in a story of mine triggers some memory they've forgotten that makes me happy. I know I like it when I remember a long forgotten part of my childhood. I've always liked stories so I guess I try to write them. Moods perhaps. Who knows? Maybe two years from now I'll be writing about Abbot and all the ridiculous things that happened to me here. It makes for a good story.

I followed
a wasp,
wings whirring,
brown body,
black sting
shining.

UNDERTOWN

The grey children were fishing in the sewer. Underneath the dark tenement, the eyes of which weeped drying sheets and dying flowers, one of them, his hands clasping the muddied bars, had spied something round and shiny, winking through the brown mists of the bottom. A broomstick was produced, and a splinter, gained by the finder, brought forth to the street its only warmth of color which it immediately hid behind a nasty fragment of cloth, hard with the dirt and blood of other wounds. The dogs gnaw anything small enough to fit between their jaws. Some chewing gum was found and placed on one end of the stick, while silent faces watched closely the hand of the constructor. The gum seemed afraid of being forced into those depths, afraid of losing contact with the street, of passing from its lowness into another, deeper, whose horrors and fears the gum could not even imagine. It fled the stick for the comparative safety of the sludge in the gutter, but finally it was subdued, and the stick was lowered between the muddied bars. Anxious faces waited for a moment, unaware of all save the silent probing of the stick, animals watching their patient fellow feel his way stealthily into the filth. With an 'Ah' of satisfaction from the holder of the stick the probing stopped, being replaced by a slow rising, an escaping, as it were, above the anxious faces across which strange tracks of white crisscrossed their way through the dark smudges of charcoal and dirt which stared at it. Stuck to the end is not the dime or even the quarter wildly imagined, but instead a bottlecap, thrown there, no doubt, by the heedless hand of the careless father of one of the disappointed faces somberly staring at it in the street. It is thrown away, unthinkingly.

It hits a stoop ball player as he is about to throw. He stands there, a worn grey spaldeen ball clutched in his hand, his fingers white from the pressure of his grasp, caught for the moment in the pose of an ancient Greek athlete, captured by the chisel of a man whose fingers, if less dirty, were equally white with pressure. His face shows nothing, all is concealed by the mirror of dirt upon it which reflects back into the street the lifelessness of that objects self. The ball in his hand, once pink upon the outside and filled with ebullience, is the same; it greets the street now with nothing on its surface but that which covers the street as well. The ball is trapped there, as in a box, pounded into submission by the incessant bouncing off the stoop, forced into conformity brutally as the father beats his strange child. And it is tired; a bounce off the second stoop can now clear only the first sewer, no more.

The statue breaks and throws the ball against the stoop, making it arc high over his head towards the expectant faces behind him. It misses all of these, choosing instead to land across the street, at the feet of a stray little girl who, in the unknowing delight of a bright, new, pink party dress, has wandered far from her gay house of crayons and coloring books. She, who but a moment before could not see the dingy greyness of the structures around her, their blank, gaping windows open to what was once the life around them, breathing in the frustrated smells of lives thrown away, lives that, having escaped into a dismal corner of the world decide to reproduce themselves, that their failure might be the more complete. She, who previously could only see and touch the sky above the

buildings, the warmth beyond the street and the light smells brought somehow into this place from above by lighter winds through still lighter corridors and halls of air, now stares vacantly, like the building, at the ball protruding ugly from the puddle at her feet, its outer fringes now transferred to the once cleanness of her dress. A white, lace handkerchief, obtained from a small purse, sleek and shiny as a seal, serves only to smear and muss still more the muddy blackness, accompanied from across the street by hoarse laughing that swells and grows, encompassing the entirety of the street - - the sewer, the bottlecap, the tenements and the dress - - in its bursting, horrible humor, that knows not really why it is laughing.

The short piece generally begins with an image that hits me while in a thoughtful state. I then cast this perception around for a period of anywhere from a day to six months. Then, when the idea that fits the image is ready, I write. The only time consumed during the actual placement of the words on the page occurs in the fixing of a few key words and phrases. Almost the entire story, however, is thought out before it hits the paper.

In this spring rain, I feel
like dying, like the earth
will take me without
hesitation. For me
the feeling is
hard to overcome. I fight it: grappling
like old opponents
we come to terms
slowly. But after
as I watch the rain touch
and flow
down the glass pane, I wonder
at the steady opening
of flowers, rising
out of rain
and soil, splashing color
over my eyes.

My writing is almost all personal. I write more to externalize my feelings than to please others. Most of the things I write (perhaps the best things) are seen by few people. Often my writing becomes so intensely involved with my life and my family that I find it impossible to criticize.

I need an editor.

This piece is less directly involved with my family and my feelings towards them than it is with my brief experience with a country. Still, I feel unable to evaluate its merit - - literarily or otherwise — because it has become a part of me.

It is intended to be without real beginning or end. Though it includes specific events, they do not necessarily follow each other in real time. There is no plot; it is the descriptions which are vital to the story. I tried to express my feelings toward a few people and a whole country.

Clare and I woke up to a soft slow brushing sound. It broke gently into my sleep. I sat up, parted the mosquito netting, and stepped to the floor. I listened. Something was outside our door. Very slowly, cautiously, I opened it and looked out. Thousands of creatures crawling in circles, rubbing wings, buzzing softly, covered the room. Their movement hypnotized me. When I looked up, I could see a face at the other end of the room. It was a new face, a dark one. My eye moved. The face had arms, and a broom. Very slowly and rhythmically they swept the wood floor. I started to take a step. The insects crunched, and I pulled my foot back into my room.

"We're trapped," I whispered to Clare.

Voices sounded outside. Someone came in with a tank. He covered the floor with a white dust, and the creatures moved slower. The buzzing stopped; the man with the tank went away, and still the broom swept great piles of dead insects.

At breakfast, we had forgotten about the bugs. We were interested in Augustine.

"Augustine, where did you come from?" Steve wanted to know.

"I no speaka English," he replied, sweeping the dining room now. "I speaka Indian and Burmese and Korean and German and . . . and Italian, but I no speaka English."

After a few days Augustine would speak to us (though he never admitted it) but with Mother and Dad he always required an interpreter.

"I go get Joseph," Augustine would say, "I no speaka English."

Joseph always came running.

"Tell Augustine I notice a cross around his neck. Ask him if he wants Sunday off to go to church."

Joseph and Augustine spoke in Burmese, then Joseph turned to Mother. "He say"

"Says," Augustine often corrected Joseph's English.

"He says 'I never go to church this Sunday; I always go next Sunday'."

Augustine came to our house every day after that. He was supposed to sweep, but most of the time he charged about after Steve, waving toy guns, and shouting.

Sometimes he told stories, usually ones about Big Brown Bear trying to get Big Black Bear on the telephone. There were always many bad connections and long talks with the operator, who, like Augustine, spoke no English. The Bears rarely got through. Those stories always ended in wild tumult, all of us rolling off the bed and chasing Augustine around the house.

Sometimes Joseph joined in our games. Joseph was our skinny little Indian cook. When he ran, the cloth of his long Burmese skirt snapped with every movement of his legs and forced him to take tiny rapid steps. His arms waved madly above his head.

We laughed at Joseph when he ran, and we laughed at him when we saw him tiptoe toward my father's door and knock gently. The gruff voice inside said, "Come in." He knocked again. The voice was louder the second time. Joseph smiled slowly, knocked one last time, and quickly disappeared into the back of the house just as the door opened and a gruff face glared out. We heard a muffled giggle.

We laughed, too, when Joseph stood next to his wife. She was a foot taller than he, and five times as round. She stood at the door and sang to him while he baked bread. Her body filled the whole doorway, and her voice filled the whole house. She never played with us. The house felt uneasy when she walked. I was very glad she never ran.

Joseph stayed most of the time in the kitchen, and tried to ignore our play. He couldn't always, though, for the Rangoon sun was brilliant and thirsty. It sucked every drop of water from us, until our bodies felt limp and our throats ached, and still it demanded more. It was then that we invaded Joseph's peace to cool our insides. We drank from the gin bottles in which the water was kept. Water gave us life, and the bottles gave us inspiration. We would stagger outside inventing new drunken games.

But I wasn't always ready to go back out. Burma was exhausting. The heat made me want to seek quiet and shade. The kitchen was dark. The concrete floor felt cool. I stayed inside and watched Joseph smile at his fat wife. I tried to keep my eyes from the plucked chicken tied up in the corner. Sometimes they seemed pulled in that direction, and I groaned as it blinked its eyes. I turned my head and looked outside. I could see the servants' long narrow house. The wood was grey. All the color had been scorched by the sun and washed away by the rain. The windows had no glass. Inside a baby cried. The house seemed naked and sad like the chicken. I turned my head again. In the back yard a goose chased Clare. I watched the women far away behind her washing clothes in the brown lake while brown children splashed nearby. I wondered why I wasn't allowed to swim in the lake. On the right I could see the edge of the park where the wild cows and the gray water buffalo were bending over to drink.

I left to find Steve and Clare and Majeed to walk to the park. We weren't allowed in the park without our nanny, Majeed. I thought I was too old for a nanny. In the park I chased the wild cows, but Majeed always called me back. I wanted to pat them, but she was frightened. It was odd to me that because Majeed was afraid to do something I was not allowed. I sat down to watch the giant crows and listen to their harsh voices until the sun drank our strength and once more we went home.

Then the rain came. It came as it did every afternoon in a great rush of water that pounded into the hot earth. Each day the rain renewed the earth, turned the crumbly dirt to rich mud. The warm water filled the flowers and ran off onto the leaves. Even then the sun shone through the great cloud gaps and the world grew brilliant as light was reflected everywhere. It poured, then the rain stopped, suddenly. That was when Burma was most beautiful. Before the sun had time to dull the land with fire, the red and yellow flowers of our garden glowed alive. The whole country was deep and green and dripping, as the rain slowly evaporated into the late afternoon sun.

The Violet Lady

A little woman
all in black
sells violets on the sidewalk
I see her
black and wrinkled
as the figs that grow here
clutching flowers,
bright blue bunches
in each fist
- - un escud menina
she whines and thrusts her wares
toward me
- - un escud
but my money
is not for violets today.
not when there are lilies and camellias
and froths of acacia or almond blossoms to be had
I shake my head
and hurry past

A block later she reappears
and extracts a wristwatch
from a fold near the bosom
it dangles,
all fire in the sun
and can be had for almost nothing
but my money
is not for wristwatches either

not when a genuine Swiss timepiece
can be found in any store
selling time
I hurry past

And back,
to where flowers are kept behind glass
catalogued in stiff arrangements
one for every occasion
delivered with a card
bearing the florist's forged signature
I see a lone scraggly lily
at Easter
the more exotic blooms
grow in distant hothouse
where the smells of fields
are bred out
and daffodils smell like fertilizer

As for watches
our are
waterproof
shockproof
dustproof
but never to be found
folded inside a bosom.

My money is for violets
now they are gone.

This short story is not meant to be analyzed. I began with a central, guiding idea of what I wanted it to be upon completion - conflict in a young man between his desire for a maternal figure and simultaneous rejection of that need as a result of hidden insecurities, the entire organic picture as it were, and used that as the skeleton, filling in around the edges. As I was writing, much unconscious imagery floated to the surface and particular themes began to recur spontaneously (ocean, mother, etc.) until individual pieces fell together and formed a whole. I wanted to combine surreality with reality, the conscious with the unconscious, and the story's major fault may lie in the weakness of the transition between the two. I tried to make the story line as tight as possible, but my tendency is to be verbose and over-write. Much of the imagery is deeply personal because of its subliminal nature, yet at the same time, it is also universal for the same reason. I can only hope that that aspect may come clearly through my style. Perhaps the best way to understand it is not to struggle with it. Rather, read it carefully, yet lightly, concentratedly and probably more than once and just allow yourself to absorb the content.

Night Child

Clutching his pillow, he bit it hard to keep from crying. A mysterious hand held his throat so tightly that it hurt and he couldn't breathe. He closed his eyes, and his mouth, and whole face, his entire body as hard as he could, straining every muscle, contorting and twisting. It hurt! It hurt! Even his toes curled up tight. Silently clutching his mother's image, he gasped like a dying fish struggling for consciousness.

But it came anyway. Crept through in the window, the crevices, the cracks in the walls, the closet, and bare spots in the rug. Just as it did every night. From behind. It moved along the floor and walls like some black flood, overwhelming. And he drowned like that, still hugging his only pacifier - a small tender piglet, suckling.

Fish in an Angry Sea

Through the center of a soundless vortex: down swirling, clutching, weeping and weightless, buffeted, blown like small, brown, driftwood, broken, beaten and down - past his brothers, and then his father, who merely watch him fall, wordlessly bidding him good-bye. Then the tiny, white figure of a woman who offers him her breast. He flails his arms, frantically swimming against the current, then frantically reaching out, screams wide open silence "The bottom! The bottom! Watch out for the end!" Their fingers graze. Contact crackles and white hot sparks flash in the dark, illuminating her features. He sees . . . a shruken skeletal mask of frozen features, desiccated and lifeless. In that groping instant of searing pain, she is dying, and dead, and death. And then he falls beyond her grasp to the eye of the maelstrom.

Child/Man

He awoke sweating, crying and shaking. The dream had touched an internal chord that sent dissonant vibrations throughout this entire body. Powerful waves travelled out in all directions, but the stone that so destroyed the opaque waters of his sleep had disappeared from the surface, leaving him to rock and shiver from the penetrating force of its explosion. He got up, finally found the bottle among his socks and took a gagging mouthful, hardly managing enough control to force it down. The liquid fire turned the water to steam. Waiting for the flood, he let the fog gather about his head and then crawled cold between his bedsheets to sleep.

Sunlight broke in through the window, shattering his sleep and forced open his eyelids. He looked about: The alarmclock measured off the moments in abrupt, neat ticks and soiled clothes were rumpled across the wooden chair. The bright reflections from the glass on his bedside table hurt his eyes. He shut them, still feeling his tiredness scratching like sand and searched for his sleep. But it had disappeared with the dark. When his fist smashed into the pillow, a head rose above the mountain of bedclothes - only one eye.

"What's the matter?" Her voice was thick.

"Nothing."

"What time is it?"

"Seven o'clock." He spat the words between clenched teeth.

"Oh Seth, come back to bed, it's too early!"

"I can't sleep!" He threw off the coverings and strode out of the room, naked and ready to fistfight with the morning. She watched him, noting the way the muscles in his legs and buttocks flexed and shifted. He moved swiftly, placing one foot solidly, quickly in front of the other: head down, arms swinging and fists tight. As he turned the corner, she nodded her head slowly and after carefully smoothing it out, lay back upon the pillow he had just punched - very gently.

Seth turned the burner on and yanked open the yellow cabinet door. Pans and pot clattered - spilled all down the counter.

"Shit!" as he kicked one of them across the floor, "Why does this always happen to me?" Five minutes later, gazing out the window, he was seated at the kitchen table, slurping from his cup and muttering aloud. Jesus, what a headache he had! His temples ached and swelled. He recalled the night before, mulling over flashes and bits of their lovemaking - so distant, far away, like a dream or some fantasy. He took an especially large mouthful . . . and burned his tongue, coffee spilling on the yellow tablecloth. He cursed loudly, then put a towel over the brown stain, poured another and sat down.

The image of Marie, half-asleep in bed appeared: naked, her hair scattered all over her head, face puffy, her partly opened eyes with dark smudges beneath, and he noticed distinct lines around her mouth. A familiar, murky fear crawled over, and he closed his eyes. She seemed older, worn out: different

"G'morning" Marie stood in the doorway, her hands thrust into the pockets of his stripped bathrobe. Too large, the cord that normally tied about his waist, hung low on her hips as she padded barefoot across the floor to put the teakettle on the stove. In one glance she absorbed the pots and pans, the spilled coffee, the broken cup and Seth staring beyond the window.

"Looks like a cyclone hit"

"I'll clean it up"

"S'okay" She picked up a sponge and began blotting the stain while he piled the pans and pots into the cupboard and forced the doors shut.

"Seth, they're all gonna fall out the next time you open it" Her voice was edged carefully with exasperation. He opened the doors, rearranged them noisily and sat down again to his coffee. Marie poured the water from the whistling tea kettle and pulled up a chair.

"Would you like an omelette?"

"I dunno. Maybe I'll make one later."

"I'll make you one. How would you like it?"

"I don't want one now." She watched his glance fall to the floor. His thoughts tumbled on. He remembered: his brothers, laughingly sitting on his head. When he was a child they came into his bedroom every morning to wake him up.

"I wonder how they're doing? Goddamit, I'd like to see Si and Carter again. They both really have everything figured out. Everything they need anyway." He frowned. "And what the fuck am I doing? Still going to school, living off my mother."

"Seth?" He looked up. Marie was intently watching him. She looked so concerned, her eyes just slightly crinkled about the corners to connote distress, her hand extended in a gesture close to pleading. Very lightly she touched his arm. "What's troubling you?"

"Nothing" Her fingers left.

"Okay" and she got from the table and began making breakfast.

Low Tide

A small figure crouched upon the edge of a high rock. Where the waves broke it was white, foamy and cold - too cold for swimming naked. Slippery seaweed grew about the base - wet, salt-smelling, sweet to her nostrils though. The bell rang over and again to the gentle undulations far out at sea and the waves broke in accordance, a dance of sound and ocean.

She stood up and turned away to view the coast, scanning from the deserted beach to the seemingly endless stretch of rocks, staring for a long time at the summer houses boarded up, the empty cliff path littered with huge rocks - back and forth, slowly, to a rhythm of her own, up and down the coast. Nothing moved. She squatted down again, hiding her head and began to rock, almost imperceptibly on her heels - back and forth, up and down.

Another figure appeared from behind a rock and moved along the shore, picking his way beneath sea covered clumps and small pools. Even though his sneakers made no noise, she suddenly looked straight at him, following the progression of his movement - no visible sign of recognition flowed between them - and then resumed her former position. Several minutes later his arms encircled her.

"Where were you?"

"Behind that rock."

"What were you doing?"

"Looking at a shell." She watched a seagull settle on the surface of the water, spreading his wings and showing her his brilliant white underside.

"I thought you'd gone, you know. There was no one; I looked."

"I was here." His arms tightened.

She imagined him next to a pool, intensely examining a snail, entirely absorbed in the shape, contour and colors. As he touched the animal's head, it curled up to within its shell. He poked it again, and this time it withdrew completely, only a tiny droplet of water remaining as proof of its airtight defense. When he saw that it merely withdrew at his touch, he dropped back into the water immediately and then left. At the bottom of the pool the snail carefully emerged.

"Seth, if you're not careful, you're gonna push me right off this cliff in a minute." They laughed together.

"I'm sorry; c'mon, let's go." When they reached the shore below, he turned to her.

"You know I love you?!" It was exclaimed so simply, that she could do nothing but brush the hair laughingly from his eyes - as would a mother. Unexpectedly, he grabbed her about the waist and began running down the beach. She squirmed and loudly protested until he let her slip to the sand, fell on her and they rolled over and over. He finally wrestled his way on top.

"Hold still, you bitch or else I'll sit on your head!"

"Oooh, I'll get you! I'll bite it off!" and she lunged at his crotch.

"Hey!" and he fell over backwards and lay still. She crawled up beside him, whispering in his ear. He grinned. And she kissed it while it lingered.

Midsummer Squall

The living rhythm of their breathing grew and faded, completely filling the silence. Tracing the contours of his face, she saw him through her fingertips, despite the dark. Details became clear and then receded before her eyes according to the pulse of her consciousness and except for that slight movement, her tired body rested inert. Yet her mind raced! Somersaulting and running from thought to thought, leaping to another, cartwheeling to the next, active and frenetic as a wild monkey. What realms does he travel in his sleep? With whom, and why, and when - the illusions forbidden to touch. To stretch her arms and snatch him back from that secret world, banish the monsters that eat his dreams, wrestle his love and devotion away from unknown, mysterious women!

Seth rolled over in his sleep and groaned, his body twitching, and when he began to sob gutturally, Marie reached and grabbed him by the arm. Slowly he emerged, part of him struggling to return, the other half still swimming. He opened his eyes, but the violent waters of his nightmare distorted his vision. He moaned, and closed them again, alternately pushing her away and then clutching her to him spasmodically. Gently she rocked him into consciousness - over and a again - until the rhythm of her movement and his breathing joined. Gradually the silence cleared and the current flowed smoothly.

"I had that dream again."

"About your mother?"

"I thought you were her."

"I'm sorry. I woke you too quickly." Within the dark that engulfed them, he felt a sudden urge to extricate himself, to see Marie.

"I'm gonna turn the light on."

"Oh Seth, not now, not again." but the lamp clicked on, illuminating her sharply.

"Look at me." he said - and felt the fragments of his nightmare melt. The light flooded all fears.

"You look beautiful." He leaned over and kissed her belly.

"Do you dream about her every night?"

"No, a lot though."

"About me?"

"Sure." Their breathing intertwined again in the quiet.

“Seth?”

“Jesus, are you going to nag me about that again?”

“Seth, you know what you should do if only to keep peace!”

“Christ, it’s always the same! That woman destroys everything - even my dreams.”

“Seth I know, but you . . . ”

“I can’t sleep. She won’t ever leave me ALONE!” And he pounded the pillow next to him. “And you! You won’t ever leave me alone either - both of you bitches!” Lightning hit ground.

“Seth!” Her voice was as taut as thin wire. “I am not your mother!”

Tension crackled and sparks flashed between them. Electricity danced in the air. And then it broke. Finally, as the undercurrent swept both away, and their tears flowed strong and swift. Grain after grain by grain, fears surfaced - and dissolved, cleansing their nakedness bloodied red. Eventually the sound of their breathing grew together and blossomed once more, his head resting upon her breast, rising and falling with the groundswells.

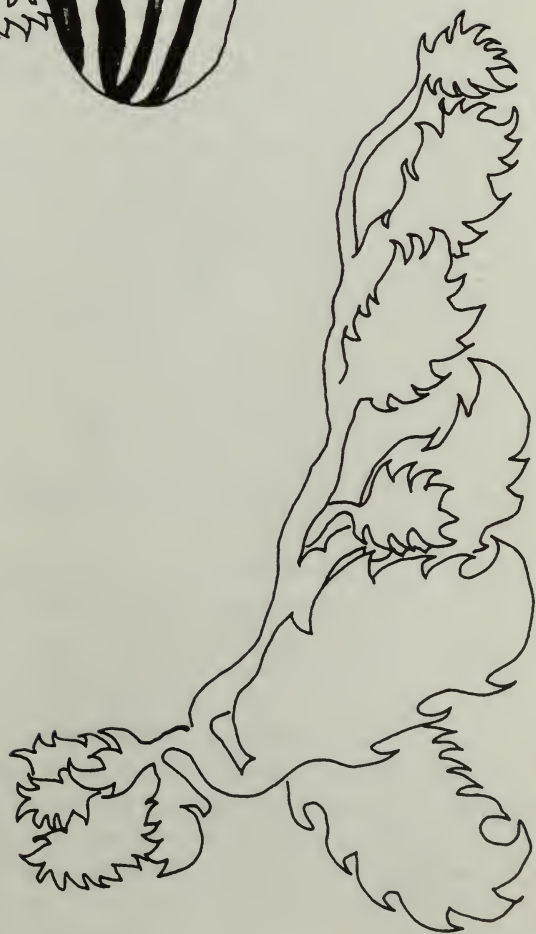
Another Sea

He drifted about, carried by the current that moved between them, floating into her eyes. She accepted him: opening, wide, wider, until their waters merged. A bit of brown seaweed clung to their ankles and the water made gentle lapping sounds when it washed over. The salt of their tears lingered, tasting mild and sweet: foam from the wave of their ocean abandoned upon the sand. Slowly the tide turned, bearing two, quiet figures out to sea. As they sank below the surface, their fingers still touched.











Harry

Harry's ass hurt like hell. He thought about that. He preferred thinking about his sore ass than worrying about the tryout. When one looks at it scientifically, he thought, the human buttocks were not made to sit upon. At least not upon the long, hard wooden bench his rear was at present warming. Buttocks are round and spongy. They cover, protect, and pad the jagged angles and protruding corners of the pelvis. The bench was hard, very hard, and flat, completely flat. His round buttocks were being squashed upon it. His pelvis was being ground into it. Harry tried shifting his weight from side to side, but one side hurt as much as the other. He sat on the edge of the bench thinking to cling there by the flesh of his rear while his pelvis was suspended in front. This too quickly became uncomfortable. He moved far back on the bench shifting some of his weight onto his thighs. This, while not easing the pain in his ass, made his things ache. Harry squirmed.

To make matters worse his underwear was sticking to him. In fact all his clothes seemed glued to his massive body. Harry had always been a heavy perspirer. Putting it bluntly, he sweated like a pig. Fat people always sweated. He was endlessly trying deodorants. The minute a new one hit the market Harry was the first to buy it. He used them alone and in combination, caking his underarms with spray, stick, cream, and roll-on in a desperate attempt to curb the flow of his sweat. Unfortunately, nothing worked. Always there were the two dark, shapeless stains radiating outward from his armpits, threatening to meet in the middle of his back and chest to form one supreme stain. Harry's pants stuck to his hairy elephant legs. Getting anything into his pockets was impossible. Harry liked to put his paws in his pockets. He didn't have to worry about them when they were hidden. He tried burrowing them in but the sweaty folds of cloth and flesh would not be penetrated. Harry crossed his arms.

His underwear gave him the most trouble. He preferred the short type but wore the jockey type because they clung less. However, less was still too much. It gripped him about the waist and below in a cold clammy grip which made any movement obscenely uncomfortable. He had to move for his sore ass, and he couldn't move because of his soggy underwear. Harry had a predicament.

Harry decided to stand. He looked up and down the long bench. There were men seated upon its entire length. This gave Harry qualms about standing. In rising he would be alone, out in the open, while if he remained seated he could stay lost in the crowd. As lost as his obesity would allow. Harry was not sure his ass hurt enough to warrant being singled out. Maybe one of the other actors would take offense at the action. One might think he was planning to move ahead in line. He wouldn't want them to get the wrong idea. If he stood he might possibly lose his rightful place in line. That secretary sitting at the stage door could get the notion that he was impatient and not interested in waiting for a chance at the role. Harry did not want to jeopardize his already tenuous chances. Besides, if he stood his underwear would still cling, and while his ass wouldn't be sore his legs and feet would soon be. Harry remained seated.

Two hours later Harry was first in line. Each time a man left the bench Harry stood and moved one position over. The others merely sideled over, dragging their rears along the bench. Harry's already tormented ass could never survive that abuse. Thus every twenty minutes or so he enjoyed a brief moment of relief before another twenty minutes of agony.

Harry sat on the end of the long bench staring at the secretary. She was nice looking, not beautiful, but attractive. Her face was small and round, her eyes were blue. Her nose was a bit small for her face and her mouth a bit too big for it, but all the same she looked nice and Harry fantasized. He would have fantasized even if she was ugly, but her nice looks made it all the more enjoyable. Harry wondered what she looked like naked. He wondered what every woman he met looked like naked. Unclothed he himself was ugly. His body was all flab, and wrinkles, and hair. The secretary made a magnificent nude. She wasn't wearing a bra and the outline of her breasts was clear against the silk of her blouse. Harry saw them in their unclothed splendour staring him in the face. They were as smooth and as soft as the silk which no longer covered them. Harry reached out and grabbed them.

Her upper body narrowed into a slim waist. Her stomach was hard and flat and her navel was small. His view was cut off at the waist where the desk blocked his vision, but he saw through the desk and the skirt she was wearing. She had perfectly formed legs and a 'petite derriere'. She was a perfect nude painted by Renoir, or perhaps Rembrandt. Harry craved fine art.

Once the picture was complete, his fantasy became one of passionate love making. They frolicked on the beach, in the lake, in the forest, and (more conventionally) in a huge, round bed with red satin sheets. She praised his great potency and skill. He was a great lover, and she loved him madly. It was nothing new to him. Women could never keep their hands off his over-abundantly masculine hippopotamus body. "Hippo Harry" they would whisper to him and then take a bite out of his earlobe. Each conquest ended in the same poetic manner. Harry was wedged regally into a fiery red coffin with a huge pillow crammed under his head. The woman was kneeling at its side weeping unconsolably. They were, of course, both naked.

"Next," smiled the secretary, "Sir you're next."

"What?"

"You can go in now, sir." Harry the Horse rose and trotted out of the room.

To write a story I must have an inspiration, an idea, or whatever you want to call it. For *Harry* the inspiration was the first line. It came to me and stuck in my mind. That is the reason I wrote this. There is nothing consciously autobiographical about *Harry*.

I write to be read aloud and listened to, not to be read silently. Have someone read *Harry* to you, you will enjoy it more.

The red-winged
blackbird
lives in the swamp, feeding
on berries. Even if
we disturb him
he flies from branch
to branch, flashing
his black wings,
flickering red.

To explain why I write would be a different story from these poems. The blackbird and the Wasp, feelings about dying, all these were at one time less than feelings, were only things that were there and needed to be cleared. I have a fear of making the whole thing into a process; the good thing, for me, is to be there with the words, listening to them clear up the whole mess.

The two pieces I have included are from a series of portrait sketches of people I remember from living in Portugal. I remember glimpses; a face, a gesture, and let the image grow until it completes itself. I try to describe what I see, what is outside, and let the description create the inside that feels and suggests.

EDITOR'S NOTE

This last issue of *Courant* attempts to bridge the gap of misunderstanding that often exists between writer and reader. By including comments and criticism from each contributor it is hoped that the work included will be perhaps a little more accessible and allow readers added insight and familiarity often discovered through a reading or seminar. Although it may appear that the issue features a somewhat select and already established group of contributors, consider the fact that their seniority allows them this last chance to be published and experienced within this school.

E. Sarah Richardson	cover
Brett Cook	1, 14-15, bottom 30
Helen Coxé	2-5
Alex Scherr	6, 9, 29, top 30
Sammy Butler	7-8
Julia Gibert	10 - 13
Joni Blaxter	16 - 21
Amy Schmertzler	22 - 26
Andy Russem	27 - 28

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